

Chapter 4

Program Direction



The federal guidelines for the Forest Legacy Program establish the program's purpose: to ascertain and protect environmentally important forest areas that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. The program promotes protecting forestland and other conservation opportunities, such as protecting important ecological values and scenic, cultural, fish, wildlife, and recreational resources. Traditional forest uses, including timber management, are accepted as consistent with the purpose of the program. As a result, the Forest Legacy Program can help protect both the traditional uses of private forestlands and the public resources that those lands provide.

Washington State recognizes that the Forest Legacy Program is unique in fulfilling a vital niche for conserving working forestlands that have important environmental characteristics. Many programs preserve lands but do not allow continued traditional use of the property by the landowner. However, the Forest Legacy Program is designed to conserve traditional uses of forestland, and when it is used with other conservation and preservation efforts, it becomes a particularly powerful tool for implementing comprehensive conservation strategies in landscapes.

Both the conservation community and private forestland owners in Washington have embraced this program that provides alternatives to development and incompatible non-forestry uses. The program is particularly valuable where landowners consider abandoning productive forestland to relocate away from populated centers, in favor of more isolated lands.

Washington State participates in the Forest Legacy Program to support comprehensive conservation efforts in the state. The state program focuses acquisitions under the program into important landscape conservation efforts to avoid a "scatter gun" approach, and it puts priority on protecting important forest watershed landscapes that are in transition to non-forest uses. Washington State's approach to the program begins with its goals and objectives and extends to the designation of the Forest Legacy Area and to the parcel evaluation and selection criteria and process.

Goals and objectives

The goals and objectives below are the basis for implementing the Forest Legacy Program in Washington. They provide a vision for managing the state program: The goals define the program intention, and the objectives declare how that intention should be met and provide tactical direction.

Goals

The goals for Washington's program reflect the values that the state's people place on natural resources and the pressures that population growth is placing on those same resources.

The goals were developed through a comprehensive process that involved the public, local government, state government, interest groups, stakeholders, and partners. The Washington State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee (private, state, federal, interest group and forestry professionals acting as an advisory group) reviewed comment and input from numerous sources, and adopted the goals for the Washington State Forest Legacy Program.

Working forestlands threatened by development were identified as the most critical for enrollment in the Forest Legacy Program. These lands rapidly are being converted to non-forest uses, and they contribute to protection of economic, environmental, cultural, and social factors. Also important is supporting conservation of ecologic and social values: water quality, habitat, important species, cultural, aesthetic, scenic, and recreation benefits.

The Goals

- Provide present and future timber management opportunities.
- Protect water quality.
- Provide habitat for native fish, wildlife and plants.
- Protect existing landscapes to discourage further fragmentation.
- Incorporate federal program goals to ensure Washington's projects meet the intent of the authorizing legislation.

The committee recommended priority be given to proposals that are working forestlands threatened by conversion to non-forest use; that are part of an organized state, federal, local or private planning effort or "Initiative" where long term protection of forests is the goal; and that provide the best water quality and wildlife habitat benefits.

Objectives

While the goals give the general intent of the program, the objectives sharpen the vision of the program by identifying the kinds of lands to include in the program. A series of objectives is tied directly to each goal. Although the list below separates the objectives by goal, close examination will show how these objectives are tied to each other, a reflection of the program's focus—support of comprehensive conservation efforts.

Acquire interest in forestland properties that:

Timber Management Opportunities

- Promote the continued or potential use of lands for commodity production (Working Forests).
- Link working forest landscapes.
- Promote continued use of the most productive forests within the major ecological forest types of the state (relates to soils, site, mass wasting potential).
- Best protect habitat and water quality through appropriate forest management regimes.
- Contribute to large forest landscapes—1,000 acres or greater—that are actively managed for forest use and are not overly fragmented with developed parcels, promoting sustainable multiple use forest management practices.

Water Quality

- Protect important riparian functions such as properties with shore lands, wetlands, water bodies, rivers and year round streams.
- Enhance recharge benefit to important aquifers and/or enhance protection of priority watersheds.
- Make upland connections to salt water ecosystems.

Habitat

- Protect critical habitat for Threatened or Endangered Species.
- Enhance and/or buffer important habitat.
- Promote protection of wildlife corridors.
- Protect dwindling or uncommon ecological forest communities.

Landscapes



- Link protected forest landscapes (Example: Private with Conservation Easement, State, Local Government, Federal Lands).
- Provide recreational opportunities whenever possible.
- Contribute to the protection of forest landscapes that are part of an organized state, federal, local or private planning effort or “Initiative” where long term protection of forests make up a critical component of the plan. (Mountains to Sound Greenway and The Cascades Foothills Initiative are examples).
- Buffer currently unthreatened forest land base by protecting transitioning forest lands.
- Support goals of the state fire plan.

Federal Intent

- Provide landowners with alternatives to development of forest properties.
- Protect the most threatened lands from conversion to other uses;. For example, lands both in the Forest Resource Zone and Rural Residential Zone will soon be in transition to non-forest uses.
- Slow or eliminate development potential of adjacent forest properties.
- Protect or enhance lands with special scenic values.
- Preserve and protect existing cultural or historic resources sites.
- Leverage other funding sources (preferably non-federal) or are part of projects that can directly contribute toward the cost of the Conservation Easement.
- Complement other federal lands and investments.
- Provide for increased public access.

Focus and priorities

The goals and objectives provide vision for Washington’s Forest Legacy Program, but to implement the program more effectively, the state program has identified additional focus and priorities. These reflect the goals and objectives, and help shape the Forest Legacy Area and the project evaluation process and criteria. (See Chapter 5.)

Focus

Because Washington State has found that the Forest Legacy Program is particularly effective when it is combined with local, private, and federal conservation efforts, the state has chosen to participate in the program as a means to support comprehensive conservation efforts in Washington.

Focusing acquisitions under the program into important landscape conservation efforts avoids a “scatter gun” approach, which could dilute the effectiveness of the program. Individual Legacy parcels will not stand alone, but will be part of a combined effort to protect sustainable landscapes.

For the past ten years, Washington State’s AON limited Forest Legacy Program acquisitions virtually to three counties. The state is now proposing expanding the Forest Legacy Area into other counties, if the parcels meet federal and state program goals.

The state will target landscapes strategically, as it has in the past (e.g., Mountains to Sound Greenway), focusing Forest Legacy acquisitions in support of program goals, and encouraging other similar programs, strategies and efforts to protect sustainable landscapes

Combined efforts not only make the program more effective over the landscape, they also protect larger forest landscapes that better sustain the goals and objectives of the program.

Washington State is proposing expansion of the Forest Legacy Area into other counties that can justify acquisitions based on federal and state program goals.

Priorities

Many forested parcels may be threatened with conversion to non-forest uses. The Washington Forest Legacy Program places priority on protecting not just parcels, but important forest landscapes (at watershed level) that are in transition to non-forest uses. A landscape is considered “in transition” where working forestland is prone to fragmentation, and development.

Working forestlands near population centers are often segregated into smaller parcels when lands change ownership. The likelihood of a parcel

being managed as a working forest diminishes as the land is segregated into smaller and smaller ownerships, and 40-to-80-acre parcels seem to be the point of diminishing returns for landowners. Landowners who can't afford to manage the lands for commodity use because of increased population pressures and changing regulations may feel economic pressure to sell.

The state program intends to give acquisition priority to private forestlands that are in the portions of watershed administrative units near rural developed land, and that are still designated resource lands of long-term significance (Forest Resource Zoned) by county comprehensive plans.

Focusing acquisitions in this area will target transitioning forest resource lands and at the same time better protect water quality, habitat, timber management, and the establishment of viable landscapes. Properties that connect with adjacent working forest landscapes can become a buffer against development for remaining working forestland blocks.